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SUBJECT: Niger: ECOWAS MEDIATOR AND GON PRIME MINISTER OPEN THE INTER-NIGERIEN POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Ref: a) Niamey 1004 b) Niamey 928

¶1. Summary: On December 21, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Mediator, Abdulsalami Abubakar, and Government of Niger (GON) Prime Minister (PM) Ali Badjo Gamatie, co-chaired over the opening ceremony of the Inter-Nigerien Political Dialogue (INPD). The aim of the INPD is to arrive at a peaceful resolution to the current political crisis in the Republic of Niger (RON). GON officials, diplomatic corps (including the ambassadors of Algeria, United States, France, China, Nigeria, European Union), international institution senior representatives (e.g., UNOWA, UNDP), religious leaders (Muslim and Christian), union and civil society leaders, and traditional leaders attended the ceremony. Print, radio and television media provided extensive coverage. The four opening ceremony speakers were PM Gamatie, Coordination des Forces pour la Democratie et la Republique (CFDR)/Opposition leader Amadou Boubacar Cisse, Mouvement Populaire de la Refondation de la Republique (MPRR)/GON Head of Delegation Seini Oumarou (Note: former PM/current National Assembly President under the Sixth Republic. End note.) and ECOWAS Mediator Abdulsalami Abubakar. The Opposition decision to go along with the much disputed GON demand that negotiations be held in Niamey (in lieu of Abuja) removed a major block to the launch of what Nigeriens hope will develop into fruitful negotiations. End summary.

¶2. PM Gamatie launched the hour-long INPD opening ceremony with remarks that there is "no divergence between the Opposition and GON on the need for a dialogue to consolidate institutions that meet the desires of the Nigerien people." He thanked Mediator Abubakar for accepting the mission he hopes will secure a "consensual agreement and credible reconciliation" sought by the Nigerien people.

¶3. CFDR/Opposition leader Cisse also thanked the ECOWAS Mediator for his "engagement in initiatives to promote dialogue among Nigeriens." Cisse noted that Nigeriens have followed for the last several months the efforts of international institutions and development partners to find a resolution to Niger's political crisis. He opined that for close to ten years the RON had exercised the normal functions of a democracy, held free and fair elections and maintained a respect for rule of law and state institutions, such as the Constitutional Court. He lamented that the GON had not followed the good models of Cape Verde and Ghana of peaceful transition but, instead followed the poor examples of Sudan and Zimbabwe that hindered alternance. He added that "the world has been following the events in the RON, from the "widely-opposed referendum to the recently disputed national assembly elections." He closed with the hope that the RON would again "find itself among the family of democratic nations."

¶4. GON negotiator Oumarou spoke of the composition of the MPRR

coalition and also thanked the Mediator and his team for taking on the mission it had been assigned. He stressed that "every nation must adopt democracy to suit its own local conditions" and stated "that is the reason democracy in the United States differs from that in France, that of Brazil from that in Japan, that in Senegal from that of Pakistan." He added that each nation has its inalienable rights to choose the governance its wants and insisted that the Nigerien people had determined its own future through a referendum. He closed his remarks noting his delegation is ready for an open, frank discussion, and emphasized that Nigeriens watching and listening to the dialogue are counting on the negotiators to succeed.

¶15. ECOWAS Mediator Abubakar highlighted the historic act the negotiations represented for the RON. He reminded attendees that he had consulted with the various stakeholders over several weeks and expressed gratitude that the GON and Opposition have indicated willingness to hold a dialogue that is vital for both RON and the region. He stressed that no dialogue can be held in a vacuum and implored the negotiating parties to look for a peaceful, successful end to the crisis. He thanked the stakeholders and international community for its contributions during the consultation period. He asked the negotiating parties to be poised to make concessions and seek areas of agreement; to use frankness and honesty during the negotiations in order to reach an end beneficial to the Nigerien people. He closed by stating that the world is waiting for an outcome typical of the cohesion for which Nigeriens are known.

¶16. The room was then emptied with a request that the negotiators, Mediation team and members of the diplomatic corps assemble to take a group photo, but the Opposition members declined the offer and

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responded that they would wait until the end of negotiations. Consequently, one photo for local media was taken without Opposition representation. After the photo, the diplomatic corps and other observers left the venue and the negotiating teams proceeded to meet behind closed doors. (Note: Notable Opposition leaders absent from the proceedings included former PM Hama Amadou, former National Assembly President Mahamane Ousmane and CFDR coalition/PNDS Party leader Mahamadou Issoufou. End note.)

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